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ON YAN XIN, QIGONG MASTER

To The Editor of the *Journal*:

"Parapsychology in the People's Republic of China: 1979-1989" (*JASPR*, 1991, 85, 119-143) refers to Yan Xin, a medical doctor considered to be one of China's foremost qigong masters. In the fall of 1991, I attended a qigong lecture and demonstration presented by Dr. Yan, sponsored by the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. The demonstration made me hesitant to accept some of the statements made about Dr. Yan's work in the article.

Though the lecture was not openly publicized, about 140 people attended, including many from the Chinese community in the San Francisco area. Dr. Yan began by speaking (in Chinese with translation) about principles of qigong, discussing it as a form of energy with healing properties. When experiencing qi, he emphasized, people react in many diverse ways.

He then began the demonstration by saying that he had already sent energy to the audience and opened their qi (also spelled chi in Chinese and ki in Japan). He insisted several times that everyone should stay in the room until the end, as leaving with one's qi "open" would be harmful (only one or two left during the two-hour presentation). He directed the audience to sit in a specific posture—on the edge of the chair, spine erect, hands suspended in front of the body, eyes closed (and to be kept closed). One or two persons began reacting immediately, and others did so as the minutes passed. The reactions included body movements such as shaking, swaying, and rocking; and vocalizing of sounds: moaning, sighing, and crying. Perhaps half of the group was affected (despite the instructions, I opened my eyes and pecked, as did others). Dr. Yan talked from time to time, urging people to stay in the posture, allow any response to happen, and saying that whatever happened was beneficial. Some of his assistants moved among the audience and massaged shoulders and backs. At one point there was excitement at the front of the room: an elderly man who had been in a wheel chair was up and walking across the floor, encouraged by Dr. Yan and others. Dr. Yan remained at the front of the room. He occasionally adjusted some audience members' postures. A woman whom he touched told me that his hands were cool, as they were also when he shook hands with me before the talk. The demonstration lasted about an hour and a half, and it concluded with a physical procedure to close down the qi. Some of the people in his party told me later that he had done similar demonstrations in China for groups of 100,000 people.

As for subjective effects, an informal poll of the ITP students and faculty who attended the presentation found only one out of 25 who sensed a transmission of energy. I personally felt one transient tingle, but this was

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a few minutes after Dr. Yan said he had transmitted qi, and I could not conclude this was more than hopeful autosuggestion.

During the demonstration, I found that I could get my hands to move about in the air spontaneously, with a bit encouragement and some disso- ciation. However, I did not feel any impulses to react more strongly, as some others evidently did.

The demonstration reminded me of what often happens in various body- oriented therapies such as Reichian, bioenergetics, and breathwork. Indi- vidualy and in group workshops, people often shake, moan, cry, and respond physically. Similar effects occur in religious revivals, faith healing sessions, and in some Eastern spiritual practices (where they are referred to as *kriyas*). They can also occur with strong emotion and in response to suggestion. Depending on the setting, the effects are variously attributed to dissolving body armor, release of emotional blocks, bioenergy, the holy spirit, and purification effects. These are interpreted as psychotherapeutic, healing, or spiritual. A person can experience various states of conscious- ness with these reactions, from positive and negative emotions to tran- scendent states. The posture that was used in this demonstration was, I understand, a typical Taoist position for generating qi. In bioenergetics therapy it would also be considered a "stress" posture, which would cause the body to shake and release tension.

The accounts of healings at Dr. Yan's lecture given in the journal article are apparently post hoc reports. Again, similar reports come from body therapies and faith healing, but these are rarely the subject of follow-up studies or careful research. I did not hear of any claims of healing from the lecture that I attended, nor did I talk with the gentleman in the wheel chair.

There was no instrumentation or other tests of any paranormal effects at the talk, so I cannot speak to the claims in the article about radiation and PK effects, or whether those studies would meet accepted standards.

If the therapeutic lectures in China are like this one, we should be cautious in concluding that qi was being transmitted, healings occurred, and that paranormal effects were demonstrated. The reactions could be the result of demand characteristics, permission to express physical and emo- tional feelings, a light trance state, the stress position, compliance, and internal dynamics, without the generation or transmission of qi.

I do not think we know much about the existence and nature of ki, chi, psychic energy, kundalini, bioenergy, and similar phenomena, at least in Western frameworks, but it seems to me worthwhile to study such possi- bilities. Interest in this area is beginning to increase, and methodologies are available for research, but the type of demonstration I observed does not provide support for many claims that are made.

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